

February 16th, 2023

The Honorable Liz Linehan Co-Chair
The Honorable Ceci Maher, Co-Chair
The Honorable Anne Dauphinais, Ranking Member
The Honorable Lisa Seminara, Ranking Member
Committee on Children
Connecticut General Assembly
State Capitol Building, Room 011
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: SB 1005: An Act Concerning a Study of The Post-Pandemic Needs of Children

Chairwoman Linehan, Chairwoman Maher, Vice Chairwoman Keitt, Vice Chairwoman Kushner, Ranking Members Dauphinais and Seminara, and members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Geena Lovallo I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate and was a resident of Torrington, CT and work in a private practice located in Tolland, CT. I am writing in support of SB 1005: An Act concerning a Study of The Post-Pandemic Needs of Children.

Marriage and Family Therapists are employed in various clinical settings throughout the state, serving diverse mental health needs via: private outpatient treatment; community based and outreach programs; in-home services; school-based services; and agency inpatient and outpatient care, among others.

Connecticut has continued to see an increase in mental health needs across children and adolescents. Diagnoses that are on an upwards trend include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorders, and substance use disorders. This trend has increased the need for support in the form of outpatient, school-based, and higher level of care options (in-home, intensive outpatient treatment, partial hospitalization, inpatient); as well as ongoing escalated needs involving additional systems (DCF, police, and court services).

An establishment of a task force to continue to assess and support the needs of the children as well as the various systems they are engaged with is crucial as we move into a post-pandemic period. CTAMFT asks that on this task force, mental health providers of all professions (marriage and family therapists, social workers, professional counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, alcohol and drug counselors, etc.) be represented on the committee. Inclusion of all mental health professions would create a comprehensive committee to meet the needs of children and adolescents across the various settings and systems in which they take part in.

I am in support of SB 1005 and urge you to support SB 1005 as well. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Geena Lovallo

Geena Lovallo, LMFTA
Behavioral Wellness Clinic, Tolland, CT

Feb 16, 2023

Representative Liz Linehan, Co-Chair
Senator Ceci Maher, Co-Chair
Representative Sarah Keitt, Vice Chair
Senator Julie Kushner, Vice Chair
Representative Anne Dauphinas, Ranking Member
Senator Lisa Seminara, Ranking Member
Committee on Children
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: HB 6643: An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Mental Health and Suicide Risk Assessments Conducted at School-Based Health Centers and Insurance Coverage for the Provision of Mental Health Wellness Examinations.

Co-Chairs Representative Linehan and Senator Maher, Vice Chairs Representative Keitt and Senator Kushner, Ranking members Representative Dauphinas and Senator Seinara and members of the Committee on Children:

My name is Geena Lovallo Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate. I was a resident of Torrington, CT and work at a private practice in Tolland, CT. I am writing in support of HB 6643, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Mental Health and Suicide Risk Assessments Conducted at School-Based Health Centers and Insurance Coverage for the Provision of Mental Health Wellness Examinations.

Marriage and Family Therapists are employed in various clinical settings throughout the state via: private outpatient treatment; community based and outreach programs; in-home services; school-based services; and agency inpatient and outpatient care, among others. Marriage and Family Therapists are specifically trained through a systemic lens, and have extensive training in treating individuals, couples, families and systems as problems arise. Additionally, many MFTs are in network with the various private insurance carriers that operate in our state as well as the state's Medicaid program, Husky Health.

Connecticut has continued to see an increase in mental health needs across children and adolescents. Diagnoses that are on an upwards trend include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorders, and substance use disorders. These increasing mental health disorders, and their accompanying symptoms, often present themselves while children are at school. The proposed action of covered insurance services for suicide risk assessment, risk response and referrals for necessary treatment rendered by mental professionals would positively

impact the frequency, duration and overall outcome of suicidal children. The involvement of trained mental health providers would also decrease the demand on school system staff, outside systems (such as police, emergency departments and DCF), as well as families of suicidal students. I ask that you support this action to provide Connecticut's students with the availability of mental health providers to assess and treat the most urgent of mental health needs.

In prevention of high risk mental health needs, such as the above discussed suicide risk, I ask that you support the enactment of "Mental Health Wellness Examinations" by trained mental health providers. Currently, many mental diagnoses and symptoms go undetected, especially in children, until the level of care needs are so urgent and acute that they create a backlog of residents waiting for care from our highest level of care systems such as emergency departments, inpatient facilities and intensive outpatient programs. Similar to many medical conditions, early detection and intervention of mental health disorders can be life saving, as well as more cost effective for the state, mental health providers and residents.

I urge you to support HB 6643, with Medicaid reimbursement for mental health and suicide risk assessments conducted at school-based health centers and insurance coverage for the provision of mental health wellness examinations to better serve Connecticut residents and students in desperate need of mental health treatment.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Geena Lovallo

Geena Lovallo, LMFTA
Behavioral Wellness Clinic Tolland, CT